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ABSTRACT

Community college administrators have the unenviable role of attempting to stimulate change in an organizational structure that focuses on control and the acquisition of power to maintain control. The theme of control runs through management theory, suggesting that the ability to exercise control over situations and events enables one to fulfill goals and objectives. Ironically, organizations and organizational behaviors are not fully controllable, no matter how self-efficacious managers are. There is a counter theme in management theory, however, that focuses on the duality of the role of management, recognizing that institutions are controlled by both internal direction and external forces. Moreover, exerting too much control can limit an institution's potential. This dilemma of control is especially true for community colleges and other academic institutions. With authority contested and reality defined as a social construct, educational managers who fail to understand the need for change have become more controlling and repressive, adopting hierarchical models from the corporate sector that inhibit rather than liberate institutional participants in the exercise of their roles. The challenge for managers is to understand how their organization works, how it becomes dysfunctional, why conventional approaches to management have failed, and, above all, how to use power positively by adjusting to changing conditions and preserving institutional and individual values. Contains 17 references. (TGI)

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MANAGEMENT THAT CONSTRAINS AND MANAGEMENT THAT LIBERATES

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Biography
Dr. John S. Levin

John S. Levin is the Director of the Community College Institute for Research and Development*(*pending ABOR approval) at The University of Arizona and a member of the faculty of the Center for the Study of Higher Education. A community college practitioner in British Columbia, Canada, for twenty-three years, John Levin joined the University of Arizona in the Fall of 1993. He has considerable teaching experience, and he has worked as a community college administrator in a variety of roles including campus head of a multi campus institution. His research has focused upon the community college, including the topics of organizational change, management and governance, politics and history, and leadership. Recent research projects include an investigation of the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement on the community college and an investigation on economic and cultural globalization and the community college.

Inhibiting and Liberating Management: The Problems of Excessive Control

Community College administrators have an unenviable role. The very nature of managerial work has entrenched qualities such as decisiveness, action, and control which predispose managers to favor change, indeed to stimulate change and characterize environments as turbulent or dynamic (Crouch, Sinclair, and Hintz 1992; Mintzberg 1989; Mintzberg 1973). Yet, the structure and patterns of managing in the modern organization require an approach that is both superficial in its understanding of organizational life and occasionally dysfunctional because of its insistence on control and the acquisition of power to maintain control (Mintzberg 1989).

Management Theory

Management theory contains two dichotomous themes. One is that management of organizations is characterized by the theme of control. The second is that the theme of duality pervades management literature. This duality is also focussed upon control and pertains to the extent to which managers have the ability to direct, change, lead, and control their organizations (Pfeffer 1981). At one extreme, managers are viewed as directing, leading, and controlling their organizations, using current technology, for example, methods of scientific management, human development, or strategic planning. At the other extreme, managers are more custodial and have little or no influence or control over organizational behaviors and actions (Cameron 1984).

Control

Self-efficacy is believed to be connected to performance: strong belief in one's abilities to exercise control over situations and events enables one to fulfill goals and intentions (Bandura 1988). Political perspectives and analysis of management behaviors emphasize control as both a means and an end (Ferris, Fedor, and King 1994).

Ironically, organizations and organizational behaviors are not fully controllable (Mintzberg 1994), no matter how self-efficacious an organization's managers. Efforts to control organizations, such as strategic planning, which was highly acclaimed in the 1980s (Keller 1983), are now viewed as futile (Mintzberg 1994). Formerly, instability within the organization and turbulence without were seen as characteristics of an organization that was out of control, unmanageable, and therefore in decline (Keller 1983). Turbulence in the environment was portrayed by managers as both unpleasant and a threat to organizational stability, and managerial action to help stabilize the organization–through control–was implicitly justified (Bolman and Deal 1985; Ferris et al. 1994). Turbulence may be seen as a chimera (Crouch et al. 1992), and

managerial behaviors to control turbulence are methods to exert control over organizations. The concepts of organizational instability and environmental turbulence are perhaps nothing more than fictions, used to justify control (Mintzberg 1989).

Duality of Management

The second theme—the duality of management influence and control—flows logically from the fiction of control. Management literature reflects a conflict between organizations as instruments of internal direction, rational planning, and leadership and organizations as conditions of a variety of forces, or pressures, mostly external. While both champions of leadership theories and leadership prescriptions and rational and strategic planners favor the view that organizations can be directed, particularly by managers, recent scholarship on organizational performance and organizational change throws this view into question. The figment of external turbulence and the malevolent drive for organizational control once acknowledged as empirical realities undercut pristine views of transformational leadership and rational planning. If organizations are in fact directed by internal managers, this may be a result of false premises held by organizational members as well as stakeholders about both the purposes of the organization and the relationship of the organization to its environment.

In order to control an organization, managers must make it, and make it seem like, a machine (Mintzberg 1989). As a machine, an organization loses its human qualities and is limited in its functioning (Morgan 1986). In other words, managers who direct and control organizations may not be fulfilling the organizational mission and may have altered organizational goals. Indeed, such a narrow approach to an organization, through exercising of control and perceiving the organization as machine-like, may lead to ineffective management and dysfunctional organizations.

This dilemma of control—both the fictions upon which control is based and the outcomes of control—is exaggerated in the academic organization. Like human service organizations (Hasenfeld 1983), academic institutions are characterized by loose-coupling (Weick 1976) where goals and actions are not tightly connected. This suggests that control strategies such as rational planning, the use of logic, and formalized procedures are not likely to be effective in the academic institution.

The Community College

One way to look at the community college is to see it as at least two entities or organizations: one is an educational community, comprised of professionals who share a set of beliefs, including the meaning of authority. The other is an institution managed by rational processes such as personnel and financial management, as well as rationalized decision-making structures and formal approaches to goal-setting. As community colleges develop and grow,

these two entities become more distinct and organizational actions become isolated and disconnected (Dill 1984). This suggests fragmentation and alienation within the community college as educational management is detached from educational life, except perhaps at the department level.

The disconnected condition of the community college--where decisions and actions in one part, or at one level, of the institution are isolated from and unharmonized with decisions and actions in other parts or levels--suggests a breakdown if not in organizational functioning then in shared meanings about the realities of organizational life. It is not so much that reality in the academic institution is not what it used to be (Anderson 1990), but that reality is a challenge to locate beyond its symbols and verbal constructions. If we step back to observe the institution, we can recognize not only a conflict between one faction and another over ownership and authority, but also a struggle about definition and identity.

Inhibiting and Liberating Management?

With authority contested and with reality itself defined as a human or social construction, the nature of managerial work has surely altered. Those managers who have failed to acknowledge that what has changed most about academic institutions is how they need to be managed are likely those moving these institutions toward more hierarchical and corporate forms of decision-making. Coping mechanisms for these managers include the trying out of approaches borrowed from the corporate sector, such as quality improvement models; others include re-definitions of institutional purpose to meet the expectations of external stakeholders, such as emphasis upon curriculum reform to improve graduation rates or workplace skills. Still others include mechanisms for increasing employee participation in decision-making (Schuster, Smith, Corak, and Yamada 1994). But these can be seen as methods of control with a palatable name.

In spite of improvement initiatives and coping efforts, the management of higher education institutions in the 1980s and 1990s, like that of business organizations, has become more controlling and repressive (Bergquist 1993). The proclaimed management revolution in higher education (Schuster et al. 1994) is more an effort to control the academy. Consequently, there is little management of those conditions that characterize today's community college, such as disconnectedness, alienation, and fragmentation; few efforts to preserve what was of value from the past, its belief systems about teaching and learning, for example; and little guidance or succor for individuals and groups coping with change during transition periods, for example during leadership succession. Instead, managers are inhibiting not liberating institutional participants in the exercise of their roles. Managerial abuse of positions of power may be a contributing factor to organizational dysfunctioning (for example, labor disputes and employee alienation).

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The problem and the challenge is how to use power positively (Fullan 1991). First, the practitioner needs to understand how the organization works, how it becomes dysfunctional, and why conventional approaches to management have affected organizations negatively (Mintzberg 1989). The practitioner needs to accept that organizational behaviors are not controllable and that organizational reality is a social construction. Old methods such as negative, personal politics, monolithic solutions, grand scale innovations, and managerial isolation (Fullan 1991) are what need to change. Recognition of differences in organizational cultures, in organizational forms, and in situations might indicate that organizations are not only socially constructed but also environments which need to be infused with human spirit (Mintzberg 1989) and managed through intimate not superficial knowledge as well in accord with the values and beliefs of its members. The challenge for the practitioner is how to adjust to changing conditions and yet preserve institutional and individual values.

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